

## VA Benefits for Former Prisoners Of War

Former American POWs are eligible for special veterans benefits, including medical care in VA hospitals and disability compensation for injuries and diseases caused by internment. These benefits are in addition to regular veterans benefits and services to which they, as veterans, are entitled.

Nearly a third of the Americans held prisoner in the last five conflicts are now living. Records show that 142,232 Americans were captured and interned during World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and the Somalia and Kosovo conflicts. This includes 81 women seized on Guam or in the Philippines during World War II, and two during the Gulf War.

Of that total, an estimated 46,417 were living as of Jan. 1, 2001. This includes one from World War I, 43,194 from World War II, 2,593 from the Korean War, 602 from the Vietnam War, 23 from the Gulf War, and one from Somalia and three from the Kosovo Conflict.

### American Prisoners Of War

	<b>Total</b>	<b>WWI</b>	<b>WWII</b>	<b>Korea</b>	<b>Vietnam</b>	<b>Gulf</b>	<b>Somalia</b>	<b>Bosnia</b>	<b>Kosovo</b>
Captured & Interned	142,232	4,120	130,201	7,140	744	23	1	0	3
Returned to U.S. Military Control	125,207	3,973	116,129	4,418	660	23	1	0	3
Refused Repatriation	21	0	0	21	0	0	0	0	0
Died while POW	17,004	147	14,072	2,701	84	0	0	0	0
Alive, Jan. 2001	46,417	1	43,194	2,593	602	23	1	0	3

Congress defines a prisoner of war as a person who, while serving on active duty, was forcibly detained by an enemy government or a hostile force, during a period of war or in situations comparable to war.

*Statistical information on American POWs courtesy of Charles A. Stenger of the American Ex-Prisoners of War Association.*

### **Compensation**

Studies have shown that the physical hardships and psychological stress endured by POWs have life-long effects on health and on social and vocational adjustment. These studies also indicate increased vulnerability to psychological stress.

The laws on former POW benefits recognize that military medical records do not cover periods of captivity. A former POW is eligible for disability compensation if any of the following disabilities are found at any time at a compensable level (at least 10 percent disabling): vitamin deficiency diseases such as beriberi and pellagra, chronic dysentery, helminthiasis, malnutrition, miscellaneous nutritional deficiencies, residuals of frostbite, post-traumatic osteoarthritis, psychosis, any of the anxiety states, dysthymic disorder, peripheral neuropathy, irritable bowel syndrome, peptic ulcer disease, or ischemic heart disease (if there was localized edema during captivity).

For POWs detained for 30 days or more, it will be presumed that the disability was incurred in or aggravated during military service, unless there is evidence of some other cause.

Compensation is paid based on the degree of disability. Veterans rated as 30 percent or more disabled qualify for additional benefits based upon the number of dependents. Dependents of those rated 100 percent disabled may qualify for educational assistance.

Spouses of veterans who die as a result of service-connected disabilities are eligible for dependency and indemnity compensation. Spouses of veterans rated 100 percent disabled who die of a non-service-connected condition also are eligible under certain conditions depending on how long the veteran held the 100 percent disability rating.

As of May 2000, there were 16,705 former prisoners of war receiving compensation benefits from VA.

Current monthly compensation, according to degree of disability:

10 percent.....	\$ 101	60 percent.....	\$ 769
20 percent.....	194	70 percent.....	969
30 percent.....	298	80 percent.....	1,125
40 percent.....	427	90 percent.....	1,266
50 percent.....	609	100 percent.....	2,107

### **Medical Care**

Former POWs are not subject to VA's health-care eligibility assessment and are entitled to VA hospital care. VA may provide outpatient care without limitation to former POWs. POWs held for more than 90 days are eligible for dental treatment. Those held for less than 90 days are eligible for dental treatment for service-connected, noncompensable dental conditions.

POW coordinators are assigned to each VA regional office and medical center. Former POWs can contact VA regional offices by calling a toll-free number: 1-800-827-1000. Callers are automatically connected to the nearest VA regional office.